‘Iberville’ returns to site of first La. landing

By JOHN McMILLAN
River parishes bureau

ALLIGATOR BAYOU — Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville, 300 years older than on his first trip to Louisiana, paddled his canoe to the bank of Bayou Manchac Tuesday and once again claimed the territory in the name of Louis XIV, king of France.

Watching the re-enactment as part of Louisiana's Tricentennial celebration were Lt. Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco and Ascension Parish President Tommy Martinez as well as other elected officials and Tourist Commission representatives.

"Louisiana is now officially 300 years old," the lieutenant governor said. On March 2, 1699, Iberville first entered what is now Louisiana.

Blanco and Frank Bonifay, owner of Alligator Bayou Tours, unveiled a plaque in commemoration of Iberville's overnight stay on the banks of Bayou Manchac on March 25 of that year.

According to his journal, Iberville sailed from France in 1698 and landed on Feb. 13, 1699, at what is now Biloxi, Miss.

He then sailed to the mouth of the Mississippi River, arriving on March 2, marking his first en...

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France into what is now Louisiana.

Iberville apparently liked the spot where he camped on the banks of Alligator Bayou.

The commemorative plaque contains an excerpt from the explorer's journal saying so:

"The place where I am is one of the prettiest spots I have seen, fine level ground, beautiful woods, clear and bare of canes."

Portraying Iberville Tuesday was Edmond Boudreaux of Biloxi, Miss. Boudreaux was accompanied by a Native American guide re-enacted by Joseph O, 11, of Ascension Parish.

The boy's mother, Cheryl, said he "is part Cajun, part Cherokee and part Creek."

Before arriving at Alligator Bayou, Iberville traveled up the Mississippi River to a point where on March 17, 1699, he spotted the "red stick," which he called Baton Rouge.

Historians record that Iberville's guides next led him along what is the present-day Amite River through Lake Maurepas and Lake Pontchartrain to the Gulf of Mexico. Iberville's introduction to the short-cut opened a trade route by which European ships in the Gulf could more easily supply colonists of the new French territory.

Then, his Bayougoulia Indian guides took him down Bayou Manchac to the point at Alligator Bayou, which now has a plaque to remind visitors that "Iberville slept here."

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This route also was followed by French-Acadian refugees from Nova Scotia to Louisiana in the 1760s.

"This historic celebration is just one of more than 1,500 events scheduled for FrancoFête 99," Blanco said during Tuesday's ceremony.